

# News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
October 8, 2002

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## State Parks' Plover Recovery Effort In Place Along California Coast

SACRAMENTO – In a coordinated effort with the federal government, California State Parks, which has jurisdiction over nearly a quarter of the California coastline, has implemented a series of measures along the coast to protect the western snowy plover.

The tiny shorebird is listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act, which requires that California State Parks take measures to protect its populations. Those measures include fencing off some areas, predator control, stepped up enforcement of existing leash laws for dogs, and prohibition of dogs in some nesting and wintering areas for the bird.

"The federal Endangered Species Act transcends California State Parks but we are certainly supportive of it and obligated to deliver its mandates," said Ruth Coleman, Acting Director of California State Parks.

"Although the message was very clear from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that all levels of government had to do more on public beaches to protect plovers, I am pleased that it has given us options that keep our beaches open to the vast majority of our visitors," said Coleman.

"Instituting actions that affect a relatively few visitors and areas, despite the legitimate frustrations they cause, is far better than wholesale beach closures which the Endangered Species Act has the power to impose, when plovers are being harmed or harassed by dogs or people," she said.

The plover protection measures instituted on some areas of State Park property along the coast include:

- Fencing off some areas of beaches to protect nesting plovers and their offspring.
  - Restrictions on some human activities around nesting areas. This includes kite flying, which can scare the tiny birds.
- (more)
- Predator control.

- Improvements in plover habitat, such as removal of exotic plant species.
- Close monitoring of plover nesting areas, chick survival and overall population trends.
- Special training of State Parks field personnel in protecting plovers and their nests.
- Public education campaigns to help park visitors understand the plight of the bird and how to avoid disturbing them, particularly during nesting season.

Some areas also include restrictions on beach use by dogs. Studies show plovers perceive dogs as threats and may abandon their nests when a dog, even one securely on a leash, comes into sight.

Existing state law prohibits dogs from state beaches unless exceptions are established in specific areas by State Parks. In some cases these exceptions have been cancelled as part of the plover recovery effort.

This summer, a total of about 30 miles of state beach property were closed to dogs due to stepped up plover protection measures. However, about 130 miles of state beaches along the California coastline remain open to leashed dogs. The remaining beaches have historically been closed to dogs.

Campgrounds, parking lots and picnic areas are not generally affected by the new restrictions on dogs.

The western snowy plover was listed as a threatened species by the federal government in 1993 because of dwindling populations linked to increased development and the resulting loss of habitat, and increasing human intrusion on plover nesting areas.

Last year, with the plover population continuing to decline, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service drafted a plover recovery plan for the West Coast. Of the 62 critical nesting areas identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in California, 44 were within the boundaries of California State Parks.

The plan outlined a number of measures State Parks could implement to protect plovers. The protection measures are affecting coastal areas throughout the State Park System, but are being implemented on a case-by-case basis by State Parks in an effort to minimize the impact on its visitors.

For instance, in the San Diego Coast District, which includes about 17 miles of shoreline, five miles of beach at Border Field State Park and Silver Strand State Beach have been fenced and closed to visitors during the nesting season. The nesting areas are monitored weekly, and also are patrolled on weekends and holidays. Nest predation is controlled through an agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

While there has been no apparent recent plover nesting at Torrey Pines State Reserve and State Beach north of San Diego, a portion of sandy habitat in Los Peñasquitos Marsh  
(more)

Natural Preserve will be fenced during the upcoming nesting season to see if plovers will return

if disruptive human activities are excluded.

Some of the most important recovery areas are in the San Luis Obispo Coast District of State Parks, which includes about 14 miles of shoreline. A two-mile section of Morro Strand State Beach has been closed to dogs as a result of the new plover plan.

About 8 miles of state beaches remain open to dogs in the area, including Pismo State Beach, the north end of Morro Strand State Beach and Cayucos State Beach. There also are about two miles of non-state beaches open to leashed dogs between the south end of Morro Strand State Beach near the community of Cayucos and Cayucos State Beach.

In the far northern part of the state, within State Parks' North Coast Redwoods District, dogs and vehicles are now prohibited at the five-mile Little River State Beach. Regular monitoring is underway to determine nesting success within recovery areas. Signs also have been posted to help control illegal camping that could harm plover nests.

"Our state beaches are great places for recreation but they also are a critical link in the natural coastal ecosystem," concluded Acting Director Coleman. "We are going to have to find better ways to share this resource among competing interests and needs."

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